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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 004161

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: TURKEY: CORRUPTION CHARGES DIMMING GENC PARTY'S LUSTER

REF: A. ANKARA 3784

[B](#). ANKARA 4026

(U) Classified by Acting Political Counselor Nicholas S. Kass.
Reason: 1.5 (b)(d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: New corruption charges against Motorola deadbeat Cem Uzan, stemming from his abuse of Uzan-linked companies against Turkish citizens in Turkey, are having a negative impact on his populist, xenophobic Genc Party's standing in the public eye. The controversy surrounding the notoriously shady Uzan clan is undercutting Genc's efforts to craft a more moderate (i.e, less anti-U.S.) facade, and to cultivate ties to the Turkish State/military seen as essential for Genc's emergence as a champion of the Establishment against the ruling AK Party. End Summary.

Hitting, and Hurting, At Home

[1](#)2. (C) Cem Uzan has long been a controversial figure, stemming from a string of criminal racketeering and other charges against the Uzan business empire. Over the past year, most of the headlines focused on Uzan's defrauding of U.S. and other companies, which in a bizarre way had added to Genc's budding popularity and mystique among angrier elements of the Turkish electorate. In the words of a popular saying on the streets in Ankara and other urban locales, "if Uzan is smart enough to cheat the Americans he's smart enough to run the country." That sentiment seemed to hold sway when the mugs and suckers were the "foreigners" that, reflected in the xenophobic logorrhea of the Genc leader's stump speech, are intent on keeping Turkey perpetually in thrall.

[1](#)3. (C) Lately, however, the Uzans have been accused of fleecing Turkish citizens, whom Genc claims it is trying to protect. As reported in reftels, the GOT seized Cukurova and Kepez electricity companies -- both owned by the Uzans -- for serious accounting malfeasance. Uzan subsequently lashed out against AK and P.M. Erdogan in a speech in Bursa, prompting Erdogan to file a defamation suit against the Genc leader fueling a story that casts Uzan in the role of the heavy.

[1](#)4. (C) In recent meetings, many of our contacts have indicated to us that the corruption charges are beginning to have their effect on Uzan's popularity and public support for Genc. Huseyin Kocabiyik, former close advisor to former P.M. Tansu Ciller (herself the subject of numerous corruption charges) and head of an Ankara-based think tank, told poloff June 27 that Uzan is making major tactical mistakes in his handling of the story. "Uzan should have behaved as if he were a victim of oppression -- as Erdogan has done for so long and so successfully," he said. (Note: playing the victim was also a Ciller specialty. End note). Citing data compiled by his firm, Kocabiyik stated that in the wake of Uzan's Bursa speech, public support for Genc had dropped from 14% to 12% in a matter of days.

Takkiye Makeover Muffed

[1](#)5. (C) The corruption charges and Uzan's public rebuke come as Genc is trying to moderate its public image in a bid for respectability and the mainstream votes it needs to challenge AK. While the Genc reality remains unedifying, the rhetoric, for now, is less overtly hostile to the U.S. (reftels).

-- Uzan himself has softened his tone, pleading publicly that the USG should "trust me." Speaking to a group of reporters on June 18, Uzan noted, "we have been allies with the U.S.

for 50-60 years; America is an important friend and ally." Privately, Genc officials are trying to convey a similar message.

-- An Ankara provincial official responsible for political affairs told poloff June 12 that Genc will do whatever it takes to solve Turkey's problems. Repeating a message we have heard many times from Genc, the administrator averred, "if people want to call us fascist, then we are fascist. If people want to call us communist, then we are communist." When asked about Genc's rampant anti-American media campaign in the run-up to the Nov. 2002 elections and Operation Iraqi Freedom, the official objected, saying "we have never been anti-American -- anti-IMF, maybe, but never anti-American."

-- Genc Party's Amasya sub-provincial chairman Ali Dinc offered similar sentiments to poloff June 27. Because Genc is against the "overly strict conditions" the IMF places on loans, and because of U.S. influence in the IMF, "America gets blamed." He suggested that the U.S. is "too sensitive" to Genc's political tactics. Kemal Aksungur -- from Genc's media and public relations office -- June 24 candidly explained to poloff that the anti-American messages were "just tactics," but needed to be modified now that Genc is trying to become a serious player.

Limits to State Connections?

16. (C) As noted in ref A, contacts across the political spectrum have told us that Genc is reaching out to the military in an attempt to present itself as the only viable alternative to AK. Genc members themselves are trying to promote this perception; AK, meanwhile, clearly recognizes Genc's potential as State-backed challenger. A non-political (civil servant) Prime Ministry Adviser to Erdogan recently asserted to us that Maj. General Erdal Senel, head of the TGS Legal Department, is close to Uzan. "Hurriyet" columnist Cunevt Ulsever, among others, has also indicated to us that a number of retired senior military, including the disgruntled Gen. Doga Aktulga, are associated unofficially with Genc. Kocabiyik, the well-known political operator, suggested that there are a number of officers -- both retired and active -- who are Genc sympathizers.

17. (C) There are, however, limits to Genc's efforts to cultivate and profit from ties to the military. Ulsever speculated that the corruption charges against Uzan have made it more difficult for the Establishment to embrace him as its defender against AK. Kocabiyik discounts support to Genc from the highest levels: "the man at the top of TGS -- I don't think I need to say his name -- told me that the military will not support Genc." Several generals -- Turgut, Acar, Tasdeler, and Kalyoncu -- have privately expressed to us their disdain for Uzan and Genc, believing Uzan is out only for himself.

18. (C) According to Yahsin Topaloglu, a researcher/activist and independent pollster who has worked for AK and several centrist parties, Uzan's outreach to the generals is circumscribed by the ethnic considerations that, lying just beneath the surface of State-fostered Turkish nationalism, are omnipresent and define patterns of relationships and influence in Turkish socio-political life. Uzan, Topaloglu stated, is from Adapazari, and of ethnic Bosnian descent. While he has friends among his ethnic brethren, he is cordially despised by the "Anatolians, Chechens, Circassians," and others in the services.

One Rival Down, One to Go?

19. (C) According to a number of contacts, the Uzans have always profited from their relationships with Turkey's top guns -- including Presidents Ozal in the 1980s and Demirel in the 1990s. Now, however, Uzan appears to have been caught flat-footed by AK -- which is clearly becoming adept at some aspects of political hardball as executed in Turkey. While Genc is by no means down for the full ten-count, the recent corruption charges have disoriented it, siphoning off some of its momentum and, perhaps more importantly, tarnishing its image as a party of the people. This has left Erdogan and AK, for the moment at least, free from serious political threats -- except, perhaps, from within AK itself (septel). Our discussions with several senior military officers suggest that, consequently,

they feel compelled for now to tolerate AK in power,
precisely because they cannot see Genc as an alternative.
They would certainly do otherwise if they had any hope
that Genc could fit the bill.
PEARSON